

AFGHANISTAN OPIUM AND HEROIN PRODUCTION BACKGROUNDER

**Mark E. Souder, Chairman
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources
Committee on Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
202-225-2577**

- Over 20,000 Americans die every year from drugs, and 7-10% of heroin sold in the U.S. is traced to the opium poppies grown in the Afghan region.
- An estimated 9 to 10 million abusers, roughly two-thirds of all opiate abusers in the world, consume illicit opium of Afghan origin.
- Announcing the Survey findings during a press briefing in Brussels, Belgium, Antonio Costa, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) stated, "With 131,000 hectares dedicated to opium farming, this year Afghanistan has established a double record—the highest drug cultivation in the country's history and the largest in the world."
- The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has conducted annual opium poppy surveys in Afghanistan since 1994. [The 2004 Survey](#) shows that Afghanistan produced 87% of the world's illicit opium this year, resulting in income to Afghan opium farmers and traffickers on the order of \$2.8 billion, a sum equivalent to 60% of the legitimate GDP of the country. The UNODC 2003 report held, "out of this drug chest, some provincial administrators and military commanders take a considerable share... Terrorists take a cut as well... the longer this happens, the greater the threat to security within the country and on its borders."
- Record levels of opium cultivation are not a new concern. In 2003, the UNODC survey stated that, "There is a palpable risk that Afghanistan will again turn into a failed state, this time in the hands of drug cartels and narco-terrorists..." The 68% increase in cultivation in 2004 makes that prediction more likely.
- According to the UNODC, from 2003 to 2004 Afghanistan experienced a 64% increase of cultivated opium poppy rising from 80,000 hectares to 131,000 hectares. Cultivation in the same time period spread to all 32 provinces in Afghanistan representing 2.9% of all cultivated land. The UNODC survey reports 2004 production of 4,200 metric tons of opium, an increase of nearly 900 metric tons over 2003.
- According to the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), Afghan poppy cultivation in 2004 was estimated at 206,700 hectares compared

to 61,000 hectares in 2003, representing a 239% increase. The U.S. Government 2004 estimate, which uses different sources and methods than UNODC, is nearly 64% higher than the UNODC estimate for Afghan poppy cultivation.

- According to a 2002 DEA brief on the Burmese opium trade, roughly 7 to 15 metric tons of raw opium yield 1 metric ton of morphine base, which yields 1 metric ton of heroin. Thus, the UNODC estimate of 2004 opium production in Afghanistan of 4,200 metric tons (4,950 tons by U.S. Government estimates) could yield up to 600 metric tons of consumable heroin.
- In 2001, following the ban imposed by the former Taliban regime, an abrupt decline of illicit opium poppy cultivation interrupted a two-decade increase. It also stimulated a subsequent 10-fold increase in opium prices. After the fall of that regime, cultivation resumed at a high level in 2002 and started to spread outside the traditional areas. Although a new ban was issued in January 2002, poor compliance with the law has so far hindered efforts by the new government to curb opium cultivation – an activity further stimulated by its high revenue.
- In 2004, families growing poppy derived a potential from opium that amounts to about \$ 2.8 billion representing 60% of the country's legitimate GDP of \$4.6 billion.
- Estimates show that approximately 356,000 families cultivate opium poppy in Afghanistan. This represents an increase of nearly 100,000 families over 2003. With an estimated average of 6 to 7 members per family, this would represent a total population of about 2.3 million, or about 10% of the total population in Afghanistan.
- The Berlin Declaration, signed by 65 countries and international organizations in April 2004, states in part: "Agree...that opium poppy cultivation, drug production and trafficking pose a serious threat to the rule of law and development in Afghanistan as well as to international security, and that therefore Afghanistan and the international community shall do everything---including the development of economic alternatives---to reduce and eventually eliminate this threat."
- President Karzai of Afghanistan declared "We must fiercely fight drugs and drug production...tackle drugs, warlordism, and terrorism---all at once---because they are infinitely tied."
- According to the House Government Reform Committee's "Views and Estimates on the Fiscal Year 2005 Budget of the United States," which was approved by voice vote of the Committee on February 26, 2004, "Our British allies have identified many Afghan opium-processing plants necessary to the heroin trade. Yet, despite the financing of terrorists and other destabilizing elements from the drug trade, the Department of Defense does not view these as military targets."

The Committee urges in the strongest terms for the Department to reconsider, and will monitor this issue incident to its oversight activities on behalf of the public safety. Therefore, if the Department is unwilling or otherwise task-saturated and unable to fulfill its authorizations, the Committee would support the President's requested reduction with the proviso that the funds be redistributed to other agencies capable of filling the void."

- The Subcommittee has held three Afghanistan-related hearings recently (see <http://reform.house.gov/CJDPHR/> for more information): Afghanistan: Law Enforcement Interdiction Efforts (February 26, 2004); Afghanistan: Are the British Counternarcotics Efforts Going Wobbly? (April 1, 2004); DoD Counternarcotics: What Is Congress Getting For Its Money? (April 21, 2004); 2006 DoD Counternarcotics Budget: Does It Deliver the Necessary Support? (May 10, 2005).